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THE RELATION BETWEEN SENSATION SEEKING
AND LIFE SATISFACTION

being

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the Fort Hays State University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Science

by

Stephanie Stegman
B.S., Fort Hays State University

Date_____ Approved_____

Major Professor

Approved_____

Chair, Graduate Council

The research described in this thesis utilized human subjects. The thesis prospectus was therefore examined by the Human Subjects Research Committee of the Psychology Department, Fort Hays State University, and found to comply with Title 45, Subtitle A – Department of Health, Education and Welfare, General Administration; Part 46 – Protection of Human Subjects.

Date

Ethics Committee Chairman

ABSTRACT

The present study examined the relation between sensation seeking and life satisfaction. Participants completed four online surveys. One survey included a number of questions designed to measure personal sensation seeking level (Sensation Seeking Scale Form V). Another asked questions regarding life satisfaction (Satisfaction With Life Scale). A third survey included questions regarding one's feelings about one's self (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale). The final survey asked questions regarding perceived stress level (Perceived Stress Scale). Results indicated that higher levels of Disinhibition and Boredom Susceptibility were associated with lower levels of life satisfaction. Results also demonstrated that higher levels of Boredom Susceptibility were associated with lower levels of self-esteem. Higher self-esteem scores were associated with higher life satisfaction scores, whereas higher levels of Thrill and Adventure seeking were associated with lower stress levels. Results also suggested that higher levels of stress were associated with higher life satisfaction scores.

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INTRODUCTION

There has been extensive research done on the topics of sensation seeking and life satisfaction. Although there have been comprehensive investigations ranging from demographic variables to personality dimensions for both topics, there has been little research relating sensation seeking and the general topic of well-being. More specifically, there have been very few studies directly relating sensation seeking and life satisfaction. The following sections will discuss the aspects of sensation seeking and life satisfaction in detail, while also presenting evidence that the two topics should, or could be examined in relation to each other.

Sensation Seeking

Definition of Sensation Seeking

The topic of sensation seeking has been gaining interest and developing since the 1960's. Sensation seeking is commonly referred to as boldness or explorativeness in unfamiliar situations, or in response to novel stimuli (Zuckerman, 2007). This is embodied in Zuckerman's (1994) traditional definition of sensation seeking: "Sensation seeking is a trait defined by the seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experience" (p.27). The definition of sensation seeking has only slightly changed since the first book was written on the topic in 1979 (Zuckerman, 2007). The

main change to the definition was the inclusion of intensity as a characteristic of sensations and experiences that are rewarding for high sensation seekers and aversive to low sensation seekers (Zuckerman, 2007).

The concept of sensation seeking has been broken down into a trait and a state form. The trait of sensation seeking is described as a predisposition that high sensation seekers have to perceive less risk than others in a variety of novel situations, which leads to engaging in these novel situations. The state of sensation seeking refers to an experience of positive feelings when entering into novel situations (Zuckerman, 1979). Although sensation seeking has been referred to as both a trait and a state, it is most commonly considered a personality trait (Zuckerman, 1994).

History of Sensation Seeking

The notion of sensation seeking began with Zuckerman's idea that every individual has an optimal level of stimulation (Zuckerman, 1969b). Stimulation is considered any action or situation that elicits a response. The response caused by stimulation is a state of increased physiological activity known as arousal (Zuckerman, 1994). Stimulation and arousal are two related, but different concepts that guided the way for sensation seeking research. Optimal level of stimulation (OLS) and optimal level of arousal (OLA) theories were the basis for a measure of individual differences in sensation seeking (Zuckerman, Kolin, Price, & Zoob, 1964). The OLS theory stated that each individual has a continuum of intensity of stimulation and sensation. Along this continuum there was an optimal point where a stimulus was found most pleasurable to the individual. Anything below or above this optimal point, the individual viewed the

stimulus as less pleasurable or aversive (Wundt, 1893). Donald Hebb formed a physiological basis for the OLS using research done on the brain, which eventually led to the theory of OLA. The OLA theory was based on the idea that humans have a tendency to maintain a certain level of arousal (Hebb, 1955). This level of arousal is maintained by the reticular activating system in the body (Lindsley, 1961). Any level above this optimal level of arousal creates a need to reduce stimulation, which leads to sensation avoidance. Any level below this optimal level of arousal creates a need to increase stimulation, which leads to sensation seeking (Hebb, 1955).

New Theoretical Models

More recent findings have indicated that psychobiological, psychophysiological, and social learning aspects may play a role in sensation seeking as well. An evolutionary basis for sensation seeking might stem from the idea of approach and withdrawal (Schneirla, 1959). Depending upon how a species preferred to approach (move toward) or withdraw (move away) from a potential food source could have determined their survival. This evolutionary explanation is the basis for the psychobiological model (Zuckerman, Buchsbaum, & Murphy, 1980). This model proposes that high sensation seeking might have been considered as an advantage to any species because it increased access to food sources and mates. Because this seeking of new food and mates was potentially risky, members of a species who were lower sensation seekers might have been reluctant to venture forth (Jacobs & Koeppel, 1974; Winchick & Carment, 1988). On the other hand, low sensation seeking might have been considered an advantage as well because it decreased the risks involved in venturing out after new food. A balance

between high and low sensation seeking was needed to ensure the survival of the species. This evolutionary explanation within a species may also have had some basis for sensation seeking in humans. Society often times had a need for higher sensation seekers in specific roles such as warriors and explorers, while also needing lower sensation seekers for more monotonous, low risk jobs (Zuckerman, 1994). This balance between the more adventurous individuals and the more cautious individuals may ensure the fate of the entire society.

Another theory suggests that physiological aspects might play a role in sensation seeking as well. A psychophysiological model (Zuckerman, Simons, & Como, 1988) proposes that sensation seeking is explained by chemical reactions in the brain. This model suggests that dopamine activates exploration of social and physical environments. When these new social and physical environments are explored, the chemical norepinephrine is produced in the brain which results in arousal (Zuckerman, 1994). This model also considers serotonin to be involved with inhibition in low sensation seekers (Zuckerman, 1994). When an individual experiences a threatening or intense situation, serotonin is produced in the brain which results in an avoidance of sensation seeking. In support of this theory, sensation seeking was found to be associated with high levels of dopamine (Stuettgen, Hennig, Reuter, & Netter, 2005), while higher levels of serotonin have been found in low sensation seekers (Wiesbeck et al., 1996).

The social learning model has also been presented as a theory of sensation seeking. Although a biological model and a social learning model appear to have no similarities, they in fact are very similar. The previously mentioned psychobiological and

psychophysiological theories suggested that an individual may be predisposed to sensation seeking; the social learning model (Bandura, 1986; Horvath & Zuckerman, 1993) proposes that an individual may be predisposed to learn a sensation seeking behavior. This model suggests that sensation seeking levels may be influenced by a person's own experiences or even learned from observed outcomes of others' experiences (Zuckerman, 1994). For instance, individuals may learn to imitate certain sensation seeking behaviors if the outcome they experience is positive, or choose not to further engage in the sensation seeking behavior if the outcome they experience is negative. This effect may be the same if the individual has seen others experience positive or negative outcomes while engaging in certain sensation seeking behaviors.

The theory of sensation seeking has evolved and changed slightly over time. The notion of sensation seeking began with the idea that there were consistent individual differences in stimulation and arousal. This idea led the way for the Optimal Level of Stimulation and Optimal Level of Arousal theories. Marvin Zuckerman used these theories along with emerging sensation seeking theories such as the psychobiological, psychophysiological, and social learning model as a premise to construct a questionnaire which would measure an individual's sensation seeking trait.

The changes in the sensation seeking theory can be illustrated by the scales used to measure sensation seeking. The first Sensation Seeking Scale (Zuckerman et al., 1964), was developed forty years ago and was based on "the theoretical premise of the existence of consistent individual differences in optimal levels of stimulation and cortical arousal" (Zuckerman, 1994, p. 373). Research on this scale was extended into several

areas, which produced several more updated versions of the scale: Sensation Seeking Scale Form II (Zuckerman et al., 1964), Sensation Seeking Scale Form III (Zuckerman, 1971), Sensation Seeking Scale Form IV (Zuckerman, 1979), Sensation Seeking Scale Form V (Zuckerman, 1979), and Sensation Seeking Scale Form VI (Zuckerman, 1984b, 1984c). Although there are six forms of this scale, the Sensation Seeking Scale Form V (Zuckerman, 1979) still remains the gold standard for identifying high or low sensation seekers in order to study their behavior and biology.

Demographic Correlates with Sensation Seeking

With the invention of the Sensation Seeking Scale, there has been ample research done with sensation seeking and a variety of demographic correlates. This section will describe several demographic variables that have been found in relation to sensation seeking such as: sex, age, national differences, racial differences, socioeconomic status, leisure, vocations, and performance.

Demographic variables with the most influence on sensation seeking were sex and age. Men scored significantly higher on sensation seeking than women. This finding may have been due to sex-role stereotype differences (which can be explained by the social learning model) or possibly due to the biological differences of men and women. Sensation seeking has been linked to increased amounts of gonadal hormones such as testosterone, which supports the psychophysiological model (Zuckerman, 1979).

Sensation seeking has been found to rise between the ages of 9 and 14 (Russo et al., 1993), peaking at age 20 and then generally declining (Zuckerman, 1969a). As people age they become more cautious, conservative, law abiding and risk averse. This

may be due to wisdom gained with aging (akin to the social learning model) or to changes in the brain's chemicals (which supports the psychobiological model) (Zuckerman, 2007).

Among other demographic influences, national differences were also found on the sensation seeking scale. Students from Western countries generally scored higher on the sensation seeking than did students from Asian countries (Zuckerman, 1979). This finding might have been influenced by the cultural differences between Western and Asian countries. The Asian cultures seem to adhere to their traditions more strictly than the Western cultures. Students from Spain were also lower sensation seekers than students from the more western countries of United States, Canada and Australia (Zuckerman, 1979). This finding may possibly have been attributed to the more conservative Catholicism, which is prevalent in Spain (Zuckerman, 1994).

In regard to racial differences, Zuckerman found that Caucasians generally scored higher on the sensation seeking scale than did African Americans (Carrol & Zuckerman, 1977; Galizio, Rosenthal, & Stein, 1983; Jaffe & Archer, 1987; Kaestner, Rosen, & Apel, 1977; Karoly, 1975; Kurtz & Zuckerman, 1978; Russo et al., 1991, 1993; Sutker, Archer, & Allain, 1978; Zuckerman & Neeb, 1980). This finding could possibly have been a result of test bias because the activities listed on the Sensation Seeking Scale may not have been common forms of recreational activities for African Americans (Zuckerman, 1994).

Although socioeconomic status was a factor in sensation seeking differences, it seemed to have more of an influence in women than in men (Zuckerman & Neeb, 1980).

Cultural sex roles may have encouraged sensation seeking in men more than in women because society was more accepting of this behavior in men. These sex roles may have been more evident in the lower socioeconomic classes, because less educated parents in the lower classes would inhibit these behaviors more so than educated parents in the higher classes (Zuckerman, 1994).

In regard to sports and vocational choice, sensation seeking level has had some influence. Schroth (1995) studied college athletes and non-athletes, and found that high sensation seekers tended to participate more often in sports in general, as well as in high risk sports more often than did low sensation seekers. Examples of high risk sports were rugby and lacrosse, whereas examples of low risk sports were marathon running and soccer (Schroth, 1995). Sports, especially those that were considered high risk, likely produced arousing sensations that high sensation seekers enjoyed (Zuckerman, 1994).

There have also been similar findings in regards to vocational choice. High sensation seekers tended to seek high risk jobs more often than low sensation seekers because they considered them less monotonous than low risk jobs. Examples of high risk jobs were pilot or policeman, while examples of low risk jobs were librarian or accountant (Musolino & Hershenson, 1977). Findings have also been similar in research done with information processing and sensation seeking.

When examining basic methods of information processing, it was found that high sensation seekers were better able to remain focused on a task when there were distractions present than were low sensation seekers (Rowland et al., 1989). This may

have been likely because high sensation seekers were already used to engaging in multiple activities at the same time as a strategy to prevent boredom (Zuckerman, 1994).

Sex, age, national differences, racial differences, socioeconomic status, leisure, vocations, and information processing have all been found to be related to sensation seeking. Personality dimensions, psychopathology, and stress are other areas that have been researched in regards to sensation seeking.

Personality, Psychopathology and Stress

The relationship between sensation seeking and different personality dimensions has emerged from studies throughout the years. Sensation seeking has been found to have a significant correlation with extraversion (Costa, McCrae, & Dye, 1990).

Extraversion is known as the need for one to have higher intensity of personal interactions and stimulation. Highly extraverted individuals tend to be more sociable and person oriented (Piedmont, 1998). Sensation seeking has also been correlated with high self-esteem (Baird, 1981). Self-esteem is known as an individual's sense of his or her value or worth (Morris, 2000). These findings indicate that high sensation seekers tend to be more extraverted and have higher self-esteem than low sensation seekers. Although sensation seeking does have some effect on a few personality dimensions, it also appears to have some effect on an individual's vulnerability to stress.

In reference to sensation seeking and stress, it has been found that low sensation seekers perceived imagined life events as being more stressful than did high sensation seekers (Jorgensen & Johnson, 1990). High sensation seekers may have anticipated imagined life events as something new and exciting. It has also been found that low

sensation seekers experienced more stress as a result of major life changes (Smith, Johnson, & Sarason, 1978). Perhaps high sensation seekers did not experience stress as a result of life changes because they crave change. Contrary to these previous results, Innes and Clarke (1986) found that high sensation seekers experienced more work related stress than did low sensation seekers. Zuckerman (1994) suggests that high sensation seekers may have been more vulnerable to boredom in their jobs and therefore reported more symptoms of job stress. More recently, researchers have become more concerned with the contribution of life stresses toward psychopathology.

It has been recognized that the same degree of life stress has different effects on individuals. While life stress can be stimulating to some, it can also be harmful to others, eventually leading to psychopathology in certain individuals. Psychopathology is known as the indication of a mental or behavioral disorder (Morris, 2000). In order to gain information on different types of psychopathology, Zuckerman and Neeb (1979) studied subjects who had a history of a diagnosed disorder. Although no differences were found among patients with Anxiety Disorders and controls in their study, other findings showed opposite results. For example, inpatients with Anxiety Disorders were found to have lower sensation seeking scores than patients with other personality disorders (Thorne, 1971). These authors indicated that individuals with Anxiety Disorders may have avoided stimulation because they were too anxious to try new things. Although sensation seeking has not been found to have a relationship with generalized anxiety, a negative relationship has been found in regards to sensation seeking and fear of physical harm (Blankstein, 1976; Burkhart, Schwarz, & Green, 1978; Kilpatrick et al., 1976;

Mellstrom, Cicala, & Zuckerman, 1976). Sensation seeking has also been negatively correlated with depression, suggesting that those who suffer from depression are also low sensation seekers. (Carton, Jouvent, & Widlocher, 1992). In sum, low sensation seekers tend to experience the anxiety and depression elements of psychopathology more often than high sensation seekers.

Using the Sensation Seeking Scale, researchers have managed to explore various characteristics of sensation seekers. Studies have shown that multiple demographic correlates, personality correlates, and psychopathology all have an influence on the sensation seeking trait. Because sensation seeking is influenced by so many factors, one would theorize that it may have an impact on overall well-being and life satisfaction.

Life Satisfaction

History of Life Satisfaction

Philosophers have speculated on the necessary conditions for happiness since the time of Ancient Greece (Veenhoven, 1984). The Greek philosophers had different views on happiness. While some felt happiness was gained by suppressing desires, others felt it was gained by active fulfillment of desire (Frisch, 2006). Although promoting happiness may have originated with the Greeks, this research did not flourish until the 1960's (Diener, 1984; Veenhoven, 1984). The United States became more concerned with higher needs such as social support, love, and respect (Frisch, 2006). President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society Program led the country in applying large scale studies to assess the well-being of the United States citizens. This program was aimed at improving the national quality of life (Frisch, 2006).

It wasn't until recently however, that clinical psychologists and psychiatrists began studying happiness (Frisch, 1998b). Much research has proven that the criteria for mental health should be broadened to include happiness, life satisfaction, contentment, and capacity for joy. This movement focused on these issues instead of the negative and pathological symptoms (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Frisch et al., 1992; Kazdin, 1993a, 1993b, 2003; Ogles, Lambert, & Masters, 1996; Strupp, 1996). This new focus led the way for the field of psychology known as Positive Psychology.

Positive psychology is the study of positive subjective experiences (e.g., happiness and life satisfaction), positive individual traits, and institutions that are interested in helping people achieve a better quality of life (Diener, 2003; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The field of Positive Psychology focuses on identifying and nurturing the strengths and virtues of individuals, in hopes of creating well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Subjective well-being refers to how people evaluate their lives. These evaluations include both cognitive judgments of life satisfaction, and affective assessment of moods and emotions (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999). A person is said to have high subjective well-being if he/she experiences life satisfaction and frequent joy, and only infrequently experiences unpleasant emotions such as sadness or anger. On the contrary, a person is said to have low subjective well-being if he/she is dissatisfied with life, experiences little joy and frequently feels negative emotions such as anger or anxiety (Diener, Suh, & Oishi, 1997).

Subjective well-being consists of both a hedonic component and a life satisfaction component (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Diener & Emmons, 1984; Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991). The relative amount of positive emotions and negative emotions in a person's lifetime is considered the hedonic component (Larsen & Prizmic-Larsen, 2006). Extraversion (one's interest is directed toward things and persons outside one's self rather than one's own experiences) and neuroticism (emotional instability) are thought to work in an interchangeable fashion to influence the hedonic component. Extraversion is strongly related to having more positive emotions, while neuroticism is strongly related to having more negative emotions (Costa & McCrae, 1980). The hedonic component (experience of positive versus negative emotions) and the life satisfaction component of subjective well-being are typically moderately or strongly correlated with each other (Diener, Napa-Scollon, Oishi, Dzokoto, & Suh, 2000).

Positive Psychology is a field of study with multiple layers. Several different aspects have been explored in regard to this area. Subjective well-being is a broad topic within this field, from which life satisfaction has evolved. More recently, life satisfaction and its components have become a topic of interest among psychologists.

Definition and Theories of Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction can be defined as “a cognitive judgmental process dependent upon a comparison of one's circumstances with what is thought to be an appropriate standard” (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffen, 1985, p. 71). Life satisfaction may also be referred to as the perceived gap between what one wants and what one has (Frisch, 2006). The smaller the gap between one's aspirations and achievements, the greater the

level of satisfaction (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; Frey & Stutzer, 2001). One's aspirations, or goals, are based on what life domains are considered important to the individual. Research has shown that there are sixteen potential valued domains of life related to overall life satisfaction: health, self-esteem, goals and values/spiritual life, money, work, play, learning, creativity, helping, love, friends, children, relatives, home, neighborhood, and community (Frisch, 2006). The domains that are most closely related to one's personal goals are usually considered the most important (Diener, Diener, Tamir, Kim-Prieto, & Scollon, 2003). There are theories that explain how these aforementioned domains affect an individual's life satisfaction.

The prevalent theories in life satisfaction research are the bottom-up theories and top-down theories (Diener, 1984). According to bottom-up theories, judgments of life satisfaction are based on assessment of satisfaction in a small number of life domains (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Brief, Butcher, George, & Link, 1993; Heller, Watson, & Hies, 2004; Schimmack, Diener, & Oishi, 2002). This theory states that life satisfaction is dependent upon the sum of many positive experiences in one's life, and implies that individuals create their life satisfaction judgments by summing up a variety of external circumstances (Diener, 1984). For instance, one might base his/her global life satisfaction on his/her satisfaction within the domains of finances, romantic relationships, and health. Only bottom-up theories predict changes in domain satisfaction (e.g. satisfaction within one particular life domain). All other theories predict that changes in domain satisfaction have no effect on life satisfaction (Frisch, 2006). To improve life satisfaction from a bottom-up perspective, the focus should be on changing the

environment and experiences a person has (Compton, 2005). In support of bottom-up theories, many cross-national studies have shown that those living in impoverished countries report lower levels of subjective well-being (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002).

On the other hand, the top-down theories of life satisfaction believe that general life satisfaction causes satisfaction in specific life domains (Frisch, 2006). For example, one might experience high global life satisfaction, which leads him/her to experience higher satisfaction within the domains of finances, romantic relationships, and health. More in depth top-down theories posit that domain satisfaction is influenced by domain-specific factors. For instance, the work domain consists of four different domain-specific factors: location, duties, co-workers and income. If even one of these factors is highly successful, this might influence the entire domain satisfaction. These theories also assume that general life satisfaction has a stronger influence on satisfaction in domains that an individual considers important (Frisch, 2006). According to the top-down theories, life satisfaction is related to an individual's tendency to interpret experiences in a positive way. In order to measure this approach the experimenter must evaluate the individual's personality traits, attitudes and the way he/she interprets life experiences (Diener, 1984). To improve life satisfaction from a top-down perspective, the focus should be on changing the person's perceptions, beliefs, or personality traits (Compton, 2005). In support of the top-down theories, research has shown that specific personality traits and self perceptions such as high sociability, extraversion, and low neuroticism are highly correlated with self reported subjective well-being (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Diener & Lucas, 1999).

Several studies have attempted to determine which theory best explains life satisfaction. Diener and Larsen (1984) compared top-down and bottom-up theories and found that 52% of the variation in the scores was a result of personality (top-down theories), while only 23% was due to the summing up of situational events. Other studies have found even smaller results for support of bottom-up theories (Diener et al., 1999; Lyubomirsky, 2001). While these results indicate that both personality and situations are important, personality appears to be the most influential factor (Compton, 2005). These results indicate that the top-down theories seem to be more accurate in predicting life satisfaction than the bottom-up theories.

More recent theories focus on the thinking component of satisfaction. According to these cognitive theories, people decide how satisfied they are by comparing their current situation to standards of others, their past, and their personal goals (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1999; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade in press; Michalos, 1991; Veenhoven, 1996). A social comparison can also be used in order to make one's life satisfaction judgment. A person might compare themselves to other people who are similar to themselves, which is known as a lateral comparison. When comparing one's self to people who are viewed as better, an upward social comparison is used. Using a downward social comparison would consist of an individual comparing his/her self with people who are less fortunate (Compton, 2005). Research has shown that those individuals who report greater life satisfaction more often use downward social comparisons than upward comparisons (Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1997).

In sum, there are two primary theories that have emerged in the research of life satisfaction. The exploration of top-down and bottom-up theories has proven that both personality and situations are important factors in one's judgment of life satisfaction. Cognitive theories have also illustrated that social comparisons may play a role in one's life satisfaction judgment. Although life satisfaction is a relatively new topic, there has been significant research done in regard to its correlates.

Demographic Correlates with Life Satisfaction

There has been ample research done with life satisfaction and demographic correlates. This section will describe several demographic variables that have been found in relation to life satisfaction such as: age, cultural differences, socioeconomic status, leisure, vocations, and performance.

Studies have shown that older individuals report being more satisfied with their past and current life (Argyle, 1999), but less satisfied with their future than younger individuals (Cantril, 1965). This increase with age may be because the gap between goals and achievements becomes smaller (Campbell, Converse, & Rogers, 1976). In regard to culture, research has shown that Asian-Americans reported lower life satisfaction than Caucasian-Americans (Oishi & Diener, 2001). Satisfaction with self, freedom and recreation were important predictors of life satisfaction in individualistic cultures, but not in collectivist cultures (Diener et al., 2003). This finding may be due in part to the emphasis that individualistic cultures placed on autonomy, while collectivist cultures did not (Compton, 2005). Because of this emphasis on autonomy, individualistic cultures would be more focused on achieving individual satisfaction, while collectivist

cultures would be less focused on individual satisfaction and more focused on societal satisfaction.

Income is an important socioeconomic variable that has been shown to influence life satisfaction. While research has shown a positive correlation between life satisfaction and income (Haring, Stock, & Okun, 1984), there appears to be a stronger relationship between satisfaction and income at the lower end of the scale (Diener, Sandvik, Seidlitz, & Diener, 1993). The reason the relationship with income was weak except with poorer people may be because money was more influential when it was spent on necessities such as food and housing (Kahneman et al., 1999). Those individuals who believed they were of high social class also reported higher life satisfaction. This result may be because higher social class meant better jobs, housing, relationships and leisure (Kahneman et al., 1999). Although income does seem to play a role in life satisfaction, other research has shown that individuals who experienced a substantial change in income over a given period of time (in either direction), do not change significantly in life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1993).

Leisure and life satisfaction were found to be correlated (Veenhoven, 1994), with the relationship becoming even stronger when the leisure activity was of an active form (Bammel & Burrus-Bammel, 1996). Research has also shown that participation in a greater variety of leisure activities was associated with higher life satisfaction (Compton, 2005). Reasons leisure activities might have increased life satisfaction levels could have been because it fulfilled the need for autonomy, allowed for enjoyment of family life,

provided relaxation, offered an escape from routine, and provided positive social relationships (Argyle, 1987).

In reference to employment, research has shown that life satisfaction was higher for individuals who were employed rather than unemployed (Campbell et al., 1976; Fogarty, 1985; Inglehart, 1990). The decrease in satisfaction for the unemployed was thought to be caused by boredom, lower mental health, and worse physical health (Argyle, 1989). Higher life satisfaction was also predictive of better job performance (Judge & Hulin, 1993; Judge & Watanabe, 1993), and job success (Diener et al., 1999). The same can be said for life satisfaction and education. Those who scored higher on life satisfaction generally performed better academically (Valois, Zullig, Huebner, & Drane, 2001; Zullig, Valois, Huebner, Oeltmann, & Drane, 2001).

Age, cultural differences, socioeconomic status, leisure, vocations, and information processing have all been found to be related to life satisfaction. Personality dimensions, psychopathology, and stress are other areas that have been researched in regard to life satisfaction.

Personality, Psychopathology and Stress

In regard to personality, research has shown that some characteristics are related to life satisfaction. Several studies have found extraversion to be one of the most significant predictors of life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999). An extraverted person is defined as one who is interested in things outside his/her self, such as physical and social environments (Compton, 2005). An introverted person is more interested in his/her thoughts and feelings (Compton, 2005). Although earlier results implied that

extraversion was related to life satisfaction because of the sociability component (Bradburn, 1969), recent research has revealed this was not the case. Extraverts did not spend more time socializing with others than did introverts (Pavot, Diener, & Fujita, 1990). Extraverts were still found to be happier than introverts, even when spending time alone (Diener, Larsen, & Emmons, 1984). Research has also suggested extraverts may report greater life satisfaction because they were predisposed to experience positive emotions (Lucas et al., 2000). This positive relationship between extraversion and greater life satisfaction has also been found in cross-cultural studies (Lucas, Diener, Grob, Suh, & Shao, 2000).

Optimism and self-esteem are two important correlates of life satisfaction. A person who is predisposed to experience positive emotions might be viewed as optimistic. Those individuals who were more optimistic about the future reported higher life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999). Optimism is a global expectation that things will turn out well in the future (Scheier & Carver, 1987, 1992). Realistic optimism is optimistic thinking that does not depart from reality (Schneider, 2001). A person needed to have realistic optimism in order to foster long term well-being and high life satisfaction (Schneider, 2001). Self-esteem was also found to be a valuable predictor of life satisfaction (Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996). However, the relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction was not as strong in collectivist cultures (Diener & Diener, 1995). This can be explained because collectivist cultures placed less importance on autonomy and self-assertion (Diener & Suh, 2000).

Not only does life satisfaction have some effect on personality variables, it also appears to have an effect on an individual's vulnerability to stress. Research has shown an individual's average level of life satisfaction remains relatively stable across a life span (Costa & McCrae, 1984, 1988; Diener, 1994). An individual's self report of life satisfaction remained stable even when their environment had changed (Diener & Larsen, 1984). Although momentary factors such as mood can affect judgments of life satisfaction (Schwarz & Strack, 1991), these judgments were generally stable across situations (Diener & Larsen, 1984). Mean levels of life satisfaction had stability coefficients of 0.95 in novel versus typical situations (Diener & Larsen, 1984). These results suggest that an individual who experiences high life satisfaction is less vulnerable to life stress than an individual who experiences low life satisfaction.

While life stress can be motivating to some, it can also be destructive to others, eventually leading to psychopathology in certain individuals, especially those with low life satisfaction. Neuroticism (emotional instability) is an example of psychopathology which may have resulted from life stress in an individual. Studies have shown that individuals with high neuroticism reported lower life satisfaction (Compton, 2005; DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Magnus & Diener, 1991). Neuroticism was influential to life satisfaction because it was strongly related to feeling more negative emotions (Costa & McCrae, 1980). One reason people with higher neuroticism experienced more unpleasant affect may be because they tended to concentrate on the undesirable aspects of events (Kozma, 1996).

Anxiety and depression are other forms of psychopathology that have been examined in regard to life satisfaction. Low life satisfaction has been related to Anxiety Disorders and Major Depression (Baruffol, Gisle, & Corten, 1995). More specifically, depression (as measured by Keltikangas-Jarvinen & Rimon's (1987) Brief Depression Scale) was found to be the second best predictor of life satisfaction. In sum, those with higher depression and anxiety scores tended to be less satisfied with their life than those who scored lower on depression and anxiety.

With the recent interest in well-being and happiness, the field of Positive Psychology has produced significant research in the area of life satisfaction. Several demographic variables have been found in relation to life satisfaction. Research has also demonstrated that personality and psychopathology have an influence on life satisfaction. More specifically, extraversion, self-esteem, depression and stress have been found in relation with life satisfaction. Because these factors have also been found in relation to sensation seeking, one might assume that a relation exists between sensation seeking and life satisfaction.

Sensation Seeking and Life Satisfaction

The aforementioned theories and research on sensation seeking and life satisfaction serve to provide the foundation for a relationship between the two. Although there is similar research using these two constructs, and some research correlating some of the characteristics of sensation seeking with some of the characteristics of life satisfaction, there has been none combining the Sensation Seeking Scale Form V (Zuckerman, Eysenck, & Eysenck, 1978) and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et

al., 1985). This section will discuss extraversion, self-esteem, depression, and stress as characteristics which are shared between sensation seeking and life satisfaction.

Extraversion

Sensation seeking has been linked with extraversion. High sensation seekers tended to be more extraverted than low sensation seekers (Aluja, Garcia, & Garcia, 2003). For example, Aluja et al. (2003) conducted a study to examine the relationships between extraversion, openness to experience and sensation seeking. The sample in this study consisted of 1006 undergraduates, ranging in age from seventeen to fifty-two. The Extraversion Scale (and its facets) of the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992) was used to measure extraversion. The Sensation Seeking Scale Form V (Zuckerman et al., 1978) was used to measure sensation seeking.

Results of this study indicated that sensation seeking was significantly correlated with the Extraversion Scale of the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992), and more specifically the Positive Emotions facet of this scale. Because several studies have found extraversion to be one of the most significant predictors of life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999), one might suspect a relationship between sensation seeking and life satisfaction could be found based on these related characteristics. Because the Positive Emotions facet is the most relevant facet of the Extraversion Scale to predict well-being (Piedmont, 1998), this would lead one to hypothesize that high sensation seekers would experience more life satisfaction than low sensation seekers.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem has been correlated with sensation seeking (Baird, 1981), and has also been found to be a valuable predictor of life satisfaction (Lucas et al., 1996). For example, Emmons and Diener (1985) investigated the different personality correlates of positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction. There were two samples of undergraduate students in this study. Participants in each sample completed daily mood reports which consisted of multiple adjectives which were descriptive of specific moods. Of these adjectives, four represented positive affect and five represented negative affect. The four positive adjectives were summed to create a composite positive affect score, and the same was done with the five negative adjectives to create a composite negative affect score. All participants completed the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985), and were also administered a battery of tests in order to obtain personality characteristics.

The results of this study indicated that self-esteem (as measured by Soares & Soares's Self Perception Inventory; 1965) was positively correlated with life satisfaction (as measured by the Satisfaction With Life Scale), which suggests that those with higher self-esteem experience more life satisfaction than those with low self-esteem. Sensation seeking has also been correlated with high self-esteem, indicating those with high self-esteem are high sensation seekers (Baird, 1981). Based on the relationship that sensation seeking and life satisfaction share with self-esteem, one might assume that high sensation seekers experience more life satisfaction than low sensation seekers.

Depression

Another characteristic that has been linked to life satisfaction is depression. In order to explore this link further, Hong and Giannakopoulos (1994) investigated the relationship of life satisfaction with several personality characteristics: self-esteem, religiosity, depression, trait anger, locus of control, and psychological reactance in 818 men and 904 women, ranging in age from 17-40 living in Sydney, Australia. The participants were asked to complete a personal opinion survey in order to obtain personality characteristics.

Results indicated that life satisfaction significantly correlated with all variables except psychological reactance. Specifically, life satisfaction (as measured the Satisfaction With Life Scale) had positive correlations with self-esteem (as measured by Richardson & Benbow's Self-Esteem Scale; 1990), religiosity, locus of control, and age. The trait anger and depression variables were negatively correlated with life satisfaction. Depression (as measured by Keltikangas-Jarvinen & Rimon's Brief Depression Scale; 1987) was found to be the second best predictor of life satisfaction. Those with higher depression scores tended to be less satisfied with their life than those who scored lower on depression. This result supports previous findings that affirm a constant sense of dissatisfaction was the central component of depression (Lewinsohn, Redner, & Seeley, 1991). In relation to this finding, sensation seeking has also been negatively correlated with depression (Carton et al., 1992). This finding suggested that those who suffer from depression were also low sensation seekers. Based on the relationship that life

satisfaction and sensation seeking share with depression, one might again hypothesize that high sensation seekers experience more life satisfaction than low sensation seekers.

Life Stress

A review of the research reveals little research directly relating sensation seeking and life satisfaction, however there is some research on how stress affects either variable. High sensation seekers identified more autobiographical negative stressful life events than did low sensation seekers (Smith, Ptacek, & Smoll, 1992). Although high sensation seekers identified more stressful life events, their well-being was not affected (Smith et al., 1992). These identified negative stressful life events appeared to have a larger influence on low sensation seekers than on high sensation seekers. For example, lower sensation seekers who identified negative stressful life events have been found to have lower well-being scores than high sensation seekers with the same amount of negative stressful life events (Smith et al., 1992). These findings led the researchers to believe that sensation seeking style may have acted as a buffer against stress (Smith et al., 1992). That is, higher sensation seeking styles may lead to lower perception of stress and thereby greater well-being. This may have been attributed to the greater ability of high sensation seekers to tolerate and even thrive on increases in arousal in general, but also those due to stress specifically (Smith et al., 1992; Zuckerman, 1979).

Empirical Links Between Sensation Seeking and Life Satisfaction

With this idea in mind, Oishi, Schimmack and Diener (2001) conducted two studies with undergraduate students to determine if sensation seeking would foster life satisfaction. In these studies, the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, et al., 1985) was

used to measure life satisfaction, while part of the Extraversion Scale from the NEO-PI (Costa & McCrae, 1992) was used as a proxy measure for sensation seeking. The participants were also asked to keep a daily rating of physical pleasure (as measured by a seven point scale), a daily rating of life satisfaction, and a daily rating of social-life satisfaction. The results from both studies indicated that high sensation seekers experienced more pleasure in their social lives, and had higher levels of daily satisfaction, especially when they had more physical pleasure. In fact, the daily satisfaction of high sensation seekers was found to be more dependent on physical pleasure than that of low sensation seekers. When high sensation seekers experienced less physical pleasure, their satisfaction levels were also lower. Because high sensation seekers were shown to experience more pleasure in their social life and more daily satisfaction, one might draw the conclusion that high sensation seekers would also experience higher general life satisfaction.

Oishi, Schimmack, and Colcombe (2003) extended these findings in a third study by examining the role of excitement in the previous month. Life satisfaction and sensation seeking were measured using the same instruments from the previously mentioned studies. Results from this study indicated that while there was no direct effect of sensation seeking (as measured by Costa & McCrae's Extraversion Scale of the NEO-PI; 1992) on life satisfaction (as measured by Diener et al., Satisfaction With Life Scale; 1985), there was a positive relationship between sensation seeking and excitement (as measured by Oishi et al., five-point Excitement Scale; 2003). The excitement of high sensation seekers was considerably related to satisfaction, while more excitement for low

sensation seekers led to only a little more satisfaction. The authors of this study attributed this finding to the notion that higher sensation seekers based their life satisfaction judgments more heavily on the frequency of excitement. Because high sensation seekers tend to seek out excitement, one might assume this tendency may lead to higher life satisfaction for high sensation seekers.

Although the study by Oishi et al. (2001) did measure sensation seeking and life satisfaction, their findings may be questionable. A respectable measure of life satisfaction was used; however the sensation seeking measure used may not be suitable. The Extraversion Scale of the NEO-PI which was used is related to sensation seeking, but is not an actual measure of sensation seeking; rather, it is a correlate of high sensation seeking. In order to obtain an actual measure of sensation seeking, a more direct measure should be used to obtain the relationship between life satisfaction and sensation seeking.

The Present Study

Based on the results of the aforementioned research, and the characteristics shared by both sensation seeking and life satisfaction, there appears to be a relation between the two constructs. The purpose of this study will be to examine the relationship between sensation seeking and life satisfaction in a college sample. It is hypothesized that a positive correlation between sensation seeking and life satisfaction will be found. It is also hypothesized that there will be a positive correlation between sensation seeking and self-esteem, and life satisfaction and self-esteem. A third hypothesis predicts that there will be a negative correlation between sensation seeking and stress, and life satisfaction and stress.

METHOD

Participants

Participants for this study were college students from a small Midwestern university. The participants were recruited from various undergraduate psychology classes and graduate level psychology classes. They were asked to respond to an online survey and may have received extra credit for their participation in this study. The total number of participants was 104, which consisted of 81 females and 23 males. The age of participants ranged from 18 – 44, with an average age of 21 years and 9 months.

Materials

All participants were administered a sensation seeking scale, a life satisfaction scale, a self-esteem scale, and a stress perception scale.

Sensation Seeking Scale Form V. In this study, the Sensation Seeking Scale Form V (see Appendix A), was used to measure sensation seeking score (Zuckerman, 1979). The Sensation Seeking Scale Form V is a 40-item forced-choice scale found in the public domain. The scale consists of four subscales (10 items per subscale). The first subscale, Thrill and Adventure Seeking, is composed of items that express a desire to engage in sports or other forms of risky activities. These activities usually provide “unusual sensations of speed or defiance of gravity” (Zuckerman, 1994, p. 31). Some examples of adventure seeking behaviors might be parachuting, skiing, or scuba-diving. Most of these activities are uncommon, therefore they are expressed on the scale as intention rather than experience. The second subscale, Experience Seeking, is composed of items that measure a person’s seeking of “novel sensations and experiences through the mind

and senses” (Zuckerman, 1994, p. 31). Some factors considered in this scale are participation in music, art, travel and non-conformity. The third subscale, Disinhibition (Dis), is composed of items that describe sensation seeking through social activities. Some of these activities include parties, social drinking, gambling and sex. The Dis subscale reflects a pattern of non-conformity through rebellion against codes of acceptable behavior (Zuckerman, 1994). The fourth subscale, Boredom Susceptibility, represents an intolerance for any type of experience that is repetitive (Zuckerman, 1994). Some examples of the items listed in this subscale are being engaged in routine work, interacting with boring people, or restlessness when escaping constancy is impossible.

Participants indicated their agreement with each item by choosing A or B. The Sensation Seeking Scale Form V yields a total score (maximum of 40) and four subscale scores (maximum of 10), with higher scores indicating greater sensation seeking. This scale has high internal reliability for the total score ($\alpha = .83 - .86$), TAS subscale ($\alpha = .77 - .82$), ES subscale ($\alpha = .61 - .67$), Dis subscale ($\alpha = .74 - .78$), and BS subscale ($\alpha = .56 - .65$). Internal consistency for the overall 40-item scale ranged from .82 - .86. Good internal consistency was also found for the TAS subscale (.77 - .82), ES Subscale (.61 - .67), Dis Subscale (.74 - .78), and BS Subscale (.56 - .65). Correlations among the subscales ranged from .6 - .48 (Zuckerman, 1979). This scale has also been highly correlated with other measures of arousal seeking and optimal stimulation level in general ranging from .17 to .96, suggesting good convergent validity (Wahlers, Dunn & Etzel, 1986). Social desirability accounted for less than .5% of variance, indicating discriminant validity (Zuckerman, 1979).

The Satisfaction With Life Scale. In this study, the Satisfaction With Life Scale (See Appendix B), was used to measure global life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985). The Satisfaction With Life Scale, which is found in the public domain, consists of five questions which are scored on a scale of one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree). A sum of the items yields a total score, ranging from five (low satisfaction) to 35 (high satisfaction).

The Satisfaction With Life Scale has a test-retest calculation coefficient of .82 and coefficient alpha of .87. This scale has significant correlations with several indicators of well-being, which suggests good convergent validity (Diener et al., 1985). Agreement between peer and family reports of satisfaction with scores of participants also suggests good convergent validity (Pavot et al., 1991). Homogeneity for the items in this scale was found to be more than acceptable at .58 (Arrindell, Meeuwesen & Huyse, 1991).

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. In this study, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (see Appendix C), was used to measure global self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, which is found in the public domain, is a 10-item Guttman Scale with high internal reliability (alpha = .92). Participants indicate their agreement with each item on a four-point scale ranging from strongly agree (3) to strongly disagree (0) with a maximum score of 30, with higher scores indicating greater self-esteem. Five of the items are reverse scored (0 = 3, 1 = 2, 2 = 1, 3 = 0).

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale correlates significantly with other self-esteem measures. This scale also correlations in predicted directions with measure of anxiety and depression, demonstrating good construct validity (Rosenberg, 1979).

Perceived Stress Scale. In this study, the Perceived Stress Scale, (see Appendix D), was used to measure the amount of stress in one's life (Cohen & Williamson, 1988). The Perceived Stress Scale, which can be found in the public domain, consists of 10 items where participants read a brief statement describing a feeling or thought, and then indicate the frequency in which they have experienced these on a 5 point scale. The rating scale ranges from (0) never, to (4) very often. Scores are obtained by reversing the scores on the four positive items (0=4, 1=3, 2=2, 3=1, 4=0), and then summing across all 10 items. Higher scores indicate higher stress levels.

The Perceived Stress Scale has an internal reliability alpha coefficient of .78. This scale is highly correlated with other measure of depressive symptoms and physical symptomology, demonstrating good convergent validity. Although this scale was highly correlated with these other measures, it has been found to measure a different and independently predictive construct, which indicates good predictive validity (Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein, 1983).

Procedure

Participants were recruited from various on-campus and off-campus classes and invited to take surveys online through Fort Hays State University's web survey system. Participants were informed that this study was investigating sensation seeking and life satisfaction and were be asked to agree to participate on a consent form (see Appendix E) before beginning surveys. In addition, participants were told that extra credit might be received in exchange for participation, and that their instructors should have offered

alternative ways of gaining extra credit if they chose not to participate. Participants were also offered a debriefing statement once finished (see Appendix F).

RESULTS

Sensation Seeking general scores ranged from 6 to 35 with an average score of 19. Sensation Seeking Disinhibition Subscale scores ranged from 0 to 10 with an average score of 4. Sensation Seeking Boredom Susceptibility Subscale scores ranged from 0 to 9 with an average score of 3. Sensation Seeking Thrill and Adventure Seeking Subscale scores ranged from 0 to 10 with an average score of 6. Sensation Seeking Experience Seeking Subscale scores ranged from 0 to 10 with an average score of 5. Life Satisfaction scores ranged from 9 to 35 with an average score of 26. Self-Esteem scores ranged from 8 to 29 with an average score of 21. Stress scores ranged from 5 to 30 with an average score of 18.

Hypothesis 1: Sensation seeking will be positively correlated with life satisfaction.

The first goal of this study was to determine whether there was a significant correlation between sensation seeking and life satisfaction. First, the sensation seeking general scores were calculated by adding together all the responses on the Sensation Seeking Scale – Form V. Thus, general sensation seeking scores could range from 0 to 40. To determine participants' sensation seeking subscale scores, responses on the ten questions pertaining to each specific subscale were added separately. Each of the four sensation seeking subscales (Dis, BS, TAS, ES) scores could range from 0 to 10.

After participants' sensation seeking scores were determined, their life satisfaction scores were calculated by adding together all the responses on the

Satisfaction With Life Scale. Thus, life satisfaction scores could range from 5 to 35.

Results of a Pearson r indicated there was no relationship found between the Satisfaction With Life Scale score and the Thrill and Adventure Seeking & Experience Seeking subscales of the Sensation Seeking Scale – Form V (See Table 1).

Table 1

Intercorrelations Between Sensation Seeking and Life Satisfaction, Self-Esteem, Stress and Age (N=104)

	Life Satisfaction	Self-Esteem	Stress	Age
SS-Gen	-.18	-.07	-.11	.15
SS-Dis	-.24*	-.12	-.05	-.03
SS-BS	-.24*	-.19*	-.01	-.02
SS-TAS	.12	.12	-.26**	.04
SS-ES	-.16	-.05	.10	.34**

Note. SS-Dis = Sensation Seeking Disinhibition Subscale; SS-BS = Sensation Seeking Boredom Susceptibility Subscale; SS-TAS = Sensation Seeking Thrill and Adventure Seeking Subscale; SS-ES = Sensation Seeking Experience Seeking Subscale. Correlations marked (*) were significant at $p < .05$. Correlations marked (**) were significant at $p < .01$.

The Satisfaction With Life Scale score was significantly negatively correlated with both the Sensation Seeking Disinhibition Subscale score, $r(103) = -.24, p = .02$, and the Sensation Seeking Boredom Susceptibility Subscale score, $r(103) = -.24, p = .01$. These results demonstrate that higher levels of disinhibition and boredom susceptibility are associated with lower levels of life satisfaction.

Results from a Pearson r using only the female participants, also indicated that the Satisfaction with Life Scale score was significantly negatively correlated with both the

Sensation Seeking Disinhibition Subscale score $r(80) = -.29, p = .01$, and the Sensation Seeking Boredom Susceptibility Subscale score, $r(80) = -.28, p = .01$. There was no relationship found in women, between the Satisfaction With Life Scale score and the Thrill and Adventure Seeking & Experience Seeking subscales of the Sensation Seeking Scale – Form V (See Table 2).

Table 2

Intercorrelations Between Sensation Seeking and Life Satisfaction, Self-Esteem, Stress and Age in Females(N=81)

	Life Satisfaction	Self-Esteem	Stress	Age
SS-Gen	-.22	-.05	-.08	.22
SS-Dis	-.29**	-.07	-.04	.02
SS-BS	-.28*	-.13	.02	.10
SS-TAS	.08	.01	-.18	.08
SS-ES	-.14	.05	.23	.41**

Note. SS-Dis = Sensation Seeking Disinhibition Subscale; SS-BS = Sensation Seeking Boredom Susceptibility Subscale; SS-TAS = Sensation Seeking Thrill and Adventure Seeking Subscale; SS-ES = Sensation Seeking Experience Seeking Subscale. Correlations marked (*) were significant at $p < .05$. Correlations marked (**) were significant at $p < .01$.

Results of a Pearson r using only the male participants indicated there was no relationship found between the Satisfaction With Life Scale score and any of the Sensation Seeking Scale Form V subscales (See Table 3).

Table 3

Intercorrelations Between Sensation Seeking and Life Satisfaction, Self-Esteem, Stress and Age in Males(N=23)

	Life Satisfaction	Self-Esteem	Stress	Age
SS-Gen	-.05	-.17	-.04	-.38
SS-Dis	-.10	-.30	.15	-.19
SS-BS	-.13	-.41	.12	-.30
SS-TAS	.28	.55**	-.45*	-.02
SS-ES	-.21	-.38	.23	-.30

Note. SS-Dis = Sensation Seeking Disinhibition Subscale; SS-BS = Sensation Seeking Boredom Susceptibility Subscale; SS-TAS = Sensation Seeking Thrill and Adventure Seeking Subscale; SS-ES = Sensation Seeking Experience Seeking Subscale.

Correlations marked (*) were significant at $p < .05$. Correlations marked (**) were significant at $p < .01$.

These results demonstrate that higher levels of disinhibition and boredom susceptibility are associated with lower levels of life satisfaction in females.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a positive correlation between sensation seeking and self-esteem, and life satisfaction and self-esteem.

The second goal of this study was to determine if there was a significant correlation between sensation seeking and self-esteem, and also between life satisfaction and self-esteem. The participants' self-esteem scores were calculated by reverse scoring 5 items on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and then adding up all the item scores. Thus, total scores could range from 0 – 30. Results of a Pearson r indicated there was no relationship found between Rosenberg's Self-Esteem score and the Disinhibition, Thrill and Adventure Seeking and Experience Seeking subscale scores of the Sensation Seeking

Scale – Form V (See Table 1). However, there was a significant negative correlation found between the Rosenberg Self-Esteem score and the Sensation Seeking Boredom Susceptibility Subscale score, $r(103) = -.19, p = .05$. These results indicate that higher levels of boredom susceptibility are associated with lower levels of self-esteem.

Results of another Pearson r indicated that the Rosenberg Self-Esteem score was significantly positively correlated with the Satisfaction With Life Scale score, $r(103) = .55, p = .00$. Thus, suggesting that higher self-esteem scores are associated with higher life satisfaction scores.

Results of a Pearson r indicated there was a significant positive correlation between the Satisfaction with Life Scale score and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem score in both females $r(80) = .55, p = .00$, and males $r(22) = .56, p = .01$. Thus, suggesting that higher self-esteem scores are associated with higher life satisfaction scores in both men and women. The Thrill and Adventure Seeking subscale score was also found to be significantly positively correlated with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem score in males, $r(22) = .55, p = .01$. These results suggest that thrill and adventure seeking are associated with higher levels of self-esteem in males.

Hypothesis 3: There will be a negative correlation between sensation seeking and stress, and life satisfaction and stress.

The third goal of this study was to determine if there was a significant correlation between sensation seeking and stress, and also between life satisfaction and stress. The participants' stress scores were calculated by reverse scoring the four positive items on the Perceived Stress Scale, and then adding up all the item scores. Thus, the total scores could range from 0 - 40. Results of a Pearson r indicated there was no relationship

found between the Perceived Stress Scale score and the Disinhibition, Boredom Susceptibility and Experience Seeking Subscale scores of the Sensation Seeking Scale – Form V (See Table 1). However, there was a significant negative correlation found between the Perceived Stress Scale score and the Sensation Seeking Thrill and Adventure Seeking Subscale score, $r(103) = -.26, p = .01$. These results indicate that higher levels of Thrill and Adventure seeking are associated with lower stress levels.

Results of a Pearson r indicated that the Perceived Stress Scale score was significantly negatively correlated with the Satisfaction With Life Scale score, $r(103) = -.43, p = .00$. This finding suggests that higher levels of stress are associated with lower life satisfaction scores.

Results of a Pearson r demonstrated a significant negative correlation between the Thrill and Adventure Seeking Subscale score and the Perceived Stress Scale score in males, $r(22) = -.45, p = .03$. Thus, suggesting that thrill and adventure seeking are associated with lower stress in males. Results also indicated there was a significant negative correlation between the Satisfaction With Life Scale score and the Perceived Stress Scale score in both males, $r(22) = -.62, p = .00$, and females, $r(80) = -.38, p = .00$. These results suggest that higher levels of stress are associated with lower levels of life satisfaction in men and women.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relation between sensation seeking and life satisfaction. Although it was hypothesized that sensation seeking would be positively correlated with life satisfaction, this was not demonstrated. The results indicated that higher levels of the Sensation Seeking Disinhibition Subscale were negatively correlated with life satisfaction. Thus, individuals who reported higher levels of the disinhibition form of sensation seeking more frequently also reported lower life satisfaction. These findings suggest that those individuals who are considered “non-conformists” are more likely to be less satisfied with their lives. One explanation for this negative correlation might be the judgments these individuals receive from others in society. Those who score high on the Disinhibition Subscale commonly rebel against codes of acceptable behavior, which may result in negative judgments from others. Consistent negative judgments from others might then influence a person’s satisfaction with life.

Results also indicated that higher levels of the Sensation Seeking Boredom Susceptibility Subscale were negatively correlated with life satisfaction. Thus, individuals who reported higher levels of the boredom susceptibility form of sensation seeking more frequently also reported lower levels of life satisfaction. These findings suggest that individuals who experience boredom easily and are intolerant to repetition, are also more likely to be less satisfied with their lives. One explanation for this negative correlation might be that these individuals feel they are not being stimulated. Their inclination to be more easily bored, might leave them feeling they have no challenge or purpose, inevitably leading them to feel less satisfied with life.

Higher Boredom Susceptibility scores and Disinhibition scores were found to be significantly negatively correlated with lower life satisfaction more specifically in females. An explanation for this negative correlation might be sex-role stereotypes. Females who score higher on Disinhibition and Boredom Susceptibility are probably more likely to engage in behaviors that were once considered masculine. This type of behavior might result in criticism or negative judgments from others in society, inevitably leading to lower life satisfaction.

The second hypothesis proposed that both sensation seeking and life satisfaction would be positively correlated with self-esteem. This hypothesis was only partially supported. Results indicated that the Sensation Seeking Boredom Susceptibility Subscale was negatively correlated with self-esteem. Thus, individuals who reported higher levels of the boredom susceptibility form of sensation seeking more frequently also reported lower levels of self-esteem. These findings suggest that individuals, who are less likely to tolerate repetitiveness and are bored easily, also experience lower self-esteem. The Thrill and Adventure Seeking Subscale was found to be significantly positively correlated with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale score in males. This finding suggests that males who engage in thrill and adventure seeking often, also experience high self-esteem. This positive correlation might be explained by the idea that males attribute their self worth in terms of what they have accomplished. The more thrill and adventure seeking activities that a male has engaged in might increase his self worth, ultimately increasing self-esteem.

However, as anticipated by the literature review, life satisfaction was positively correlated with self-esteem. This was found to be true for both males and females. Thus,

individuals who reported higher self-esteem scores more frequently also reported high life satisfaction. This supports Emmons and Diener (1985) who stated that those individuals with higher self-esteem experience more life satisfaction than those with low self-esteem.

Finally, a third hypothesis proposed that a negative correlation would be found between both sensation seeking and life satisfaction with stress. Again, this hypothesis was only partially supported. A negative correlation was found between the Sensation Seeking Thrill and Adventure Seeking Subscale and stress. Thus, individuals who reported higher levels of the thrill and adventure seeking form of sensation seeking more frequently also reported lower levels of stress. More specifically, this was found to be true in males. This supports Smith et al. (1992) who stated that high sensation seekers identified more autobiographical negative stressful life events than did low sensation seekers. Furthermore, based on the literature review, higher sensation seeking styles may lead to lower perception of stress because of their ability to tolerate and even thrive on general increases in arousal (Smith et al., 1992; Zuckerman, 1979). This may explain the lack of correlation between the other three sensation seeking subscales (Dis, BS, ES) and stress. The Thrill and Adventures Seeking Subscale is composed of items that commonly illicit unusual sensations and extreme increases in arousal. This toleration of increased arousal may act as a buffer against stress.

As hypothesized, stress was found to be negatively correlated with life satisfaction. Thus, individuals who reported higher levels of stress more frequently also reported lower levels of life satisfaction. This was found to be true for both males and

females. This supports Diener & Larsen's (1984) finding which stated that an individual's self report of life satisfaction remained stable even when their environment had changed.

Implications, Limitations and Further Research

From this research, methods for identifying sensation seeking may arise.

Applying these specific styles of sensation seeking could allow individuals to increase their life satisfaction and self-esteem, while also decreasing stress. Perhaps if we informed individuals on how to identify their specific sensation seeking styles, we could increase understanding in regards to its effect on life satisfaction, self-esteem and stress.

From the exploratory analysis conducted we were able to see how different styles of sensation seeking correlated with life satisfaction, self-esteem and stress. These results could give people an understanding as to how specific types of sensation seeking affect life satisfaction, self-esteem and stress. For instance, one who scores high on the Sensation Seeking Boredom Susceptibility might try to minimize the amount of repetition they experience in a job or leisure activities in order to gain higher life satisfaction and higher self-esteem. If an individual is aware of what type of sensation seeker they are, they may be more inclined to tailor their everyday activities to increase or decrease other aspects of their life such as life satisfaction, self-esteem and stress.

One major weakness of the present study may be the nature and size of the subjects sampled. The population of students enrolled in psychology classes at Fort Hays State University consisted of 81 females and 23 males. Gender has been shown to be one of the most influential demographic variables on sensation seeking (Zuckerman, 1979). The lack of equal amounts of each gender in this sample may have skewed the results.

This weakness in population makes it hard to determine if the results of this research would generalize to the whole population.

Because this exploratory study was one of the first to consider the relationship among the above discussed variables, additional research replicating the study may be helpful. Although some references used in the literature review might be considered dated, Marvin Zuckerman's is still considered the primary researcher in regard to sensation seeking. It would be interesting to use the Zuckerman's newer version of the Sensation Seeking Scale – Form VI to see if the results were the same. Furthermore, self-esteem has been measured using several different surveys, so possibly implementing another form to measure self-esteem levels would be helpful.

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APPENDIX A

Sensation Seeking Scale Form V

*Sensation Seeking Scale Form V***Interest and Preferences Test**

Directions: Each of the items below contains two choices A and B. Please indicate which of the choices most describes your likes or the way you feel. In some cases you may find items in which both choices describe your likes or feelings. Please choose the one which better describes your likes or feelings. In some cases you may find items in which you do not like either choice. In these cases mark the choice you dislike least. Do not leave any items blank. It is important you respond to all items with only one choice, A or B. We are interested only in your likes or feelings, not in how others feel about these things or how one is supposed to feel. There are no right or wrong answers as in other kinds of tests. Be frank and give your honest appraisal of yourself.

1. A. I like “wild” uninhibited parties.
B. I prefer quiet parties with good conversation.
2. A. There are some movies I enjoy seeing a second or even third time.
B. I can’t stand watching a movie that I’ve seen before.
3. A. I often wish I could be a mountain climber.
B. I can’t understand people who risk their necks climbing mountains.
4. A. I dislike all body odors.
B. I like some of the earthy body smells.
5. A. I get bored seeing the same old faces.
B. I like the comfortable familiarity of everyday friends.
6. A. I like to explore a strange city or section of town by myself, even if it means getting lost.
B. I prefer a guide when I am in a place I don’t know well.
7. A. I dislike people who do or say things just to shock or upset others.
B. When you can predict almost everything a person will do and say he or she must be a bore.
8. A. I usually don’t enjoy a movie or play where I can predict what will happen in advance.
B. I don’t mind watching a movie or play where I can predict what will happen in advance.

9. A. I have tried marijuana or would like to.
B. I would never smoke marijuana.
10. A. I would not like to try any drug which might produce strange and dangerous effects on me.
B. I would try some of the drugs that produce hallucinations.
11. A. A sensible person avoids activities that are dangerous.
B. I sometimes like to do things that are a little frightening.
12. A. I dislike “swingers” (people who are uninhibited and free about sex).
B. I enjoy the company of real “swingers.”
13. A. I find that stimulants make me uncomfortable.
B. I often like to get high (drinking liquor or smoking marijuana).
14. A. I like to try new foods that I have never tasted before.
B. I order the dishes with which I am familiar so as to avoid disappointment and unpleasantness.
15. A. I enjoy looking at home movies, videos, or travel slides.
B. Looking at someone’s home movies, videos, or travel slides bores me tremendously.
16. A. I would like to take up the sport of water skiing.
B. I would not like to take up water skiing.
17. A. I would like to try surfboard riding.
B. I would not like to try surfboard riding.
18. A. I would like to take off on a trip with no preplanned or definite routes, or timetable.
B. When I go on a trip I like to plan my route and timetable fairly carefully.
19. A. I prefer the “down to earth” kinds of people as friends.
B. I would like to make friends in some of the “far-out” groups like artists or “punks.”
20. A. I would not like to learn to fly an airplane.
B. I would like to learn to fly an airplane.
21. A. I prefer the surface of the water to the depths.
B. I would like to go scuba diving.

22. A. I would like to meet some persons who are homosexual (men or women).
B. I stay away from anyone I suspect of being “gay” or “lesbian.”
23. A. I would like to try parachute jumping.
B. I would never want to try jumping out of a plane, with or without a parachute.
24. A. I prefer friends who are excitingly unpredictable.
B. I prefer friends who are reliable and predictable.
25. A. I am not interested in experience for its own sake.
B. I like to have new and exciting experiences and sensations even if they are a little frightening, unconventional, or illegal.
26. A. The essence of good art is in its clarity, symmetry of form, and harmony of colors.
B. I often find beauty in the “clashing” colors and irregular forms of modern paintings.
27. A. I enjoy spending time in the familiar surroundings of home.
B. I get very restless if I have to stay around home for any length of time.
28. A. I like to dive off the high board.
B. I don’t like the feeling I get standing on the high board (or I don’t go near it at all).
29. A. I like to date persons who are physically exciting.
B. I like to date persons who share my values.
30. A. Heavy drinking usually ruins a party because some people get loud and boisterous.
B. Keeping the drinks full is the key to a good party.
31. A. The worst social sin is to be rude.
B. The worst social sin is to be a bore.
32. A. A person should have considerable sexual experience before marriage.
B. It’s better if two married persons begin their sexual experience with each other.
33. A. Even if I had the money, I would not care to associate with flighty rich persons in the “jet set.”
B. I could conceive of myself seeking pleasures around the world with the “jet set.”
34. A. I like people who are sharp and witty even if they do sometimes insult others.
B. I dislike people who have their fun at the expense of hurting the feelings of others.

35. A. There is altogether too much portrayal of sex in movies.
B. I enjoy watching many of the “sexy” scenes in movies.
36. A. I feel better after taking a couple of drinks.
B. Something is wrong with people who need liquor to feel good.
37. A. People should dress according to some standard of taste, neatness, and style.
B. People should dress in individual ways even if the effects are sometimes strange.
38. A. Sailing long distances in small sailing crafts is foolhardy.
B. I would like to sail a long distance in a small but seaworthy sailing craft.
39. A. I have no patience with dull or boring persons.
B. I find something interesting in almost every person I talk to.
40. A. Skiing down a high mountain slope is a good way to end up on crutches.
B. I think I would enjoy the sensations of skiing very fast down a high mountain slope.

END OF TEST

Note. Some of the items have been slightly modified from the original version of form V in order to explain outmoded colloquial or slang terms like *swingers*, to use terms more relevant to current times such as *videos* with home movies and substituting *punks* for *hippies*, to remove currently offensive terms like *queer* and substitute prevalent terms like *gay*, and to make the items more inclusive as in substituting *persons* for *members of the opposite sex* in item 29 referring to dating preferences. These should probably make no differences in item response characteristics but the author would appreciate any new information from item analysis.

APPENDIX B

The Satisfaction With Life Scale

The Satisfaction With Life Scale

Instructions:

Please indicate your age and gender.

Age: _____ Gender: M / F

Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the 1 – 7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

The 7 – point scale is: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=slightly disagree, 4=neither agree nor disagree, 5=slightly agree, 6=agree, 7=strongly agree

1. ____ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
2. ____ The conditions of my life are excellent.
3. ____ I am satisfied with my life.
4. ____ So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
5. ____ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

APPENDIX C

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

Instructions: Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. If you strongly agree, circle 3. If you agree with the statement, circle 2. If you disagree, circle 1. If you strongly disagree, circle 0.

3
strongly agree

2
agree

1
disagree

0
strongly disagree

1. ____ I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
2. ____ I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
3. ____ All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
4. ____ I am able to do things as well as most people.
5. ____ I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
6. ____ I take a positive attitude toward myself.
7. ____ On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
8. ____ I wish I could have more respect for myself.
9. ____ I certainly feel useless at times.
10. ____ At times I think that I am no good at all.

APPENDIX D

Perceived Stress Scale

Perceived Stress Scale

Instructions: The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, please indicate with a check how often you felt or thought a certain way.

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
☐ 0=never ☐ 1=almost never ☐ 2=sometimes ☐ 3=fairly often ☐ 4=very often
2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control important things in your life?
☐ 0=never ☐ 1=almost never ☐ 2=sometimes ☐ 3=fairly often ☐ 4=very often
3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”?
☐ 0=never ☐ 1=almost never ☐ 2=sometimes ☐ 3=fairly often ☐ 4=very often
4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?
☐ 0=never ☐ 1=almost never ☐ 2=sometimes ☐ 3=fairly often ☐ 4=very often
5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?
☐ 0=never ☐ 1=almost never ☐ 2=sometimes ☐ 3=fairly often ☐ 4=very often
6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?
☐ 0=never ☐ 1=almost never ☐ 2=sometimes ☐ 3=fairly often ☐ 4=very often
7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?
☐ 0=never ☐ 1=almost never ☐ 2=sometimes ☐ 3=fairly often ☐ 4=very often
8. In the last month, how often have you felt you were on top of things?
☐ 0=never ☐ 1=almost never ☐ 2=sometimes ☐ 3=fairly often ☐ 4=very often
9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?
☐ 0=never ☐ 1=almost never ☐ 2=sometimes ☐ 3=fairly often ☐ 4=very often
10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?
☐ 0=never ☐ 1=almost never ☐ 2=sometimes ☐ 3=fairly often ☐ 4=very often

APPENDIX E

Informed Consent

Department of Psychology
Fort Hays State University
Hays, KS
(785) 628-4405

Informed Consent

Study Name: The Relation Between Sensation Seeking and Life Satisfaction
Faculty Researchers: Dr. Leo Herrman
Telephone Numbers: (785) 628-4405
Student Researchers: Stephanie Stegman

The Psychology Department at Fort Hays State University supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. Your willingness to help us is greatly appreciated.

The purpose of this research project is to measure the relation between sensation seeking and life satisfaction. As a participant in this research project, you will be asked to complete four surveys. It is expected that this will take approximately 30-45 minutes. One survey asks a number of questions designed to measure your personal sensation seeking level. Another survey includes questions regarding your life satisfaction. A third survey asks questions regarding how you feel about yourself. The final survey asks questions regarding your stress level.

Your participation is voluntary but it also may be in exchange for course credit. If so, your instructor should provide an alternative method, besides research participation, of earning that credit. You will receive course credit for your participation provided your instructor awards credit for research participation and you meet the instructor's requirements to receive that credit.

This study has been reviewed to determine that it poses little or no risk of harm to you. However, in the unlikely event that you do feel any coercion, threat, or discomfort at any time during the study, you may choose to withdraw by closing your web browser. If you choose to withdraw, you will still receive any course credit or other payment promised to you in exchange for your participation.

Any information obtained from you will be kept strictly confidential. You may be assigned an arbitrary subject number to assist in data collection.

You will gain no benefits by participating in this study other than educational (or course credit if it is offered by your instructor). The researchers are obligated to tell you as much as you care to know about the study after your part in the study is complete. A written summary of this study will appear on the FHSU Psychology Department's webpage at it's conclusion (late Fall 2010).

All persons who take part in this study must click on the box below. By clicking on the box below you indicate that you have been informed of your rights as a participant, and you have agreed to participate on that basis. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the researchers listed or Dr. Janette Naylor, chair of the Fort Hays State University Department of Psychology Ethics Committee. She can be reached at 785-628-4405.

By clicking "Continue" I affirm that: I am at least 18 years of age, have read and understood my rights and the study description on this page, and voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Continue

APPENDIX F

Debriefing

Department of Psychology
Fort Hays State University
Hays, KS
(785) 628-4405

Debriefing

The purpose of this research project is to investigate the relationship between sensation seeking and life satisfaction, and their relationship with self-esteem and stress. The assumption being that if you are a high sensation seeker, you will experience higher life satisfaction, higher self-esteem, and less stress. Thus, we hypothesize that there will be a positive correlation between sensation seeking, life satisfaction and self-esteem. It is also hypothesized that there will be a negative correlation between both sensation seeking and life satisfaction with stress.

At the conclusion of this semester, a written summary of this study will be posted on the FHSU Psychology Department's webpage (<http://www.fhsu.edu/psych/>) under "research." If you have any questions about this research project, you may contact the faculty researcher, Dr. Leo Herrman at (785) 628-4405 or student researcher, Stephanie Stegman (lilsteff16@hotmail.com).

If, after participating in this research you are feeling distressed in any manner, the following resources can offer you professional support and counseling. If you do not live near Hays, we encourage you to call your local mental health center.

Fort Hays State University Kelly Center (free of charge to students)
Picken Hall Rm. 308
(785) 628-4401

High Plains Mental Health Center (Hays, KS)
(785) 628-2871

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact Dr. Janett Naylor, Chair of the Fort Hays State University Dept. of Psychology Ethics Committee (785-628-4405).

VITA

Stephanie J. Stegman

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Phone: (760) 717-7319

Education: Fort Hays State University, B.S., Psychology, 2003

Graduate Study: Fort Hays State University 2003 – 2010

Professional Memberships:

Psi Chi National Honor Society in Psychology

Graduate Association of Students in Psychology (Student President)

Professional Experience:

State Hospital Liaison:	High Plains Mental Health Center Sept. 2007 – Nov. 2007
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Case Manager:	High Plains Mental Health Center Feb. 2006 – Sept. 2007
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Clinical Internship:	Kelly Center Fort Hays State University Aug. 2004 – May 2005
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Areas of Interest:

Personality, Sensation Seeking

THESIS typed by Stephanie Stegman using Microsoft Word on an Asus Laptop
Computer and Printed on an iP4300 printer.